

Guard Use Of Public Lands

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The National Guard has faced opposition in communities from West Virginia to Nevada after proposing training missions on or near public lands.

National forests appear most frequently targeted for Guard exercises. About 90 of them are experiencing some level of military use, according to federal estimates.

In West Virginia, protesters last fall were able to stop the Air National Guard from beginning a proposed operation over about half of the Monongahela National Forest.

Mary Wimmer, a West Virginia Sierra Club officer, said noise from the jets flying over the forest was the major concern. Furthermore, the Guard wanted to practice bombing missions and set controlled fires in the region about 35 miles east of Charleston.

"People who hunt and backpack in the forest were worried about finding large, live mines," she said.

Wimmer said the Air National Guard did not want any restrictions or want the public involved in the decision to use the park. She said residents saw the Guard's plans as a "military attack on public lands."

Although the Guard's environmental assessments did not call for restricting its use of the area, public opposition was enough to stifle the idea, she said.

In Minnesota, the **Army** National Guard proposed last year to build a training camp to make bombing runs in a 40-mile site adjacent to a canoe area and a national forest near Duluth.

John Oelkers, former president of Minnesota Conservation Federation, said residents were concerned about how the Guard's training would affect the bald eagles, timber wolves and other endangered species in the area.

After protesting and persuading the Guard to do an environmental impact statement, the training base has so far not been built.

Some environmentalists have taken the Guard to court to express opposition to training on public grounds.

In Nevada, the Sierra Club filed suit in February 1987 against the federal government to stop the Air National Guard from flying low-altitude training missions over a 1,000-square-mile area in the northern part of the state.

The area included a national antelope refuge, a national wildlife refuge and eight wilderness study area.

The Guard failed to conduct any environmental reports, in violation of standards set up by the National Environmental Policy Act for all military operations, the suit alleges. The Sierra Club argues the Guard could adversely impact wildlife, livestock, local residents and users of the recreational area.

The suit is pending.